

*from the Author.*

*The Medical Profession in its Relations  
to Society and the State.*

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AN ORATION

DELIVERED ON THE EIGHTY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,

*Thursday, March 8th, 1855.*

BY J. F. CLARKE, Esq.

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MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND;  
HONORARY ASSOCIATE OF THE ROYAL MEDICO-BOTANICAL SOCIETY;  
CORRESPONDING FELLOW OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF SURGERY, MADRID;  
ETC ETC,

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LONDON:

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1855.

TO THE  
PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS  
OF  
The Medical Society of London,

THIS ORATION

(PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST)

IS RESPECTFULLY

Dedicated.

## AN ORATION.

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MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN,—We are assembled together on this occasion to celebrate the eighty-second anniversary of the Medical Society of London. Originally established by a few of the celebrated men of the last century, this now venerable institution claims to itself the distinguished honour of being the parent of all similar bodies in the kingdom. Until this Society was established there was nothing to be compared in any way to a parliament of the profession. No means existed previously, except through the medium of books, by which the busy practitioner could communicate his experience or observations to those most deeply interested in such important matters. Even the literature of medicine might be regarded as a sealed book to the great mass of the profession; and though we could boast of many most learned and able works, there was nothing like an adequate channel for the distribution of the many facts which were being daily developed. The result, as might naturally be expected, was a continual series of misunderstandings and disagreements in the profession, by which the quarrels of authors might be said to be put into the shade. The honour, then, of making the first attempt to smooth down these differences, and to bring about a better feeling amongst the physicians and surgeons of the time, is due to the founders of the Medical Society of London.

It must have been evident to these illustrious individuals, that the want of unity and of union had been most disastrous to the medical body. Unhappily, the example so wisely set has not been followed to an extent that was probably anticipated, and now at the end of more than four-score years it is to be regretted that there is little to boast of in the

way of union, and common purpose amongst us. It is true that as a Medical Society, as a collection of practitioners combined together for a common purpose, we present a remarkable instance to the world; for, instead of some fifteen or twenty, who formed the list of fellows in the last century, we count our numbers by hundreds, embracing all classes of the profession, and all anxious for the general good. I feel that upon such an occasion as this I shall not be travelling out of the record if I attempt to show you that our position as a profession, in regard to the public and the State, is not such as it ought to be. The reason for this is obvious. The union of the profession, so anxiously attempted to be established by our predecessors, has unfortunately not been carried out. It is true that we, acting upon the true conservative principle of reforming our position in unison with the times in which we live, have done everything to favour so desirable an end; but there have been influences at work—influences modified by the spread of education—which have tended to make the medical profession a house divided against itself. To this division are the degradations and misfortunes to which we have been subjected mainly owing. It is impossible to suppose, with our individual and social position, that if we had been united in defence of our common rights, we could have been, at the present moment, so powerless, and with so little voice in the parliament or in the state. I shall not weary you with a history of the past—of the struggles that we have encountered—of the victories we have achieved, or the defeats we have sustained. It will be sufficient to say, that we are better educated, far more numerous and far more independent than we were, at the close of the last and during the first quarter of the present century; but we are powerless as a profession when acting for the greatest good of the greatest number.

I am most desirous, on such an occasion as this, to refrain from entering into any discussion that may be regarded as political; but it seems to me to fall within the province of the orator of this Society, to speak with a certain amount of freedom upon causes which influence our social position. I do this the more readily, because some of my predecessors in this honourable position, have, in discourses which I should



in vain attempt to rival, suggested an elevation of our station in society by a variety of means. The most important of these have been the raising of the standard of education of the medical student, the formation of a higher tone of etiquette in relation to our dealings with the public, and our transactions with each other. Most willingly do I admit the high importance of these objects, most cordially do I allow that the attainment of these desiderata would confer the greatest benefit upon us; but I humbly contend, that these are not the only means by which our position is to be improved, or by which our status in society is to be elevated. Until we can bear with more union and force upon the Government, in a political sense, we must still expect to occupy an inferior position to the sister professions. To diagnose the disease accurately is said to be half the cure, I shall attempt to show you, by unmistakable symptoms, that we do labour under a disease of a peculiar character. I shall attempt to give you evidence, that we are entitled to every assistance that the State can give us, but I must leave it for you to indicate the mode of cure, and the means by which it may be carried out.

Amongst the numerous complaints which we have a right to make against the Government—complaints which would have no cause to exist if we were fairly and properly represented—may be mentioned the constitution of the Commission of Lunacy. In a department pre-eminently medical, the chairman of the commission is a peer of the realm—a nobleman highly popular, no doubt, from his unwearied efforts in the cause of humanity, but certainly in no other way qualified to fill the important position in which he has been placed. The other commissioners, who really take the responsible and active part of the duties, are lawyers—certainly, in my opinion, the very worst class of men to whom could be entrusted such a charge. We all know, in matters relating to insanity, that the lawyer is influenced solely by the legal bearings of the case, and is only too apt, on all occasions, whether before a tribunal or not, to treat the opinion of the medical witness as the mere result of a feeling of partisanship, or of other influences not creditable to our profession. The truth is, that a mere lawyer is incapable of forming a correct judgment on such a

subject, and therefore finds it to his interest to treat lightly, or, if possible, to totally ignore, the only evidence upon which he ought to rely, that of the medical practitioner.

We must all have felt indignant, on reading the reports of the trials which have taken place from time to time on questions of insanity, in relation to the responsibility of testators and criminals, at the injustice to which our brethren have been exposed. I full well recollect, on the trial of Oxford for shooting at the Queen—a trial at which I was subpoenaed to give evidence in consequence of having been the medical attendant of the accused and his family—this was strikingly manifested. Upon the side of the prisoner, amongst other distinguished persons who were called to give evidence in favour of the non-responsibility of the prisoner on the ground of insanity, were Dr. Conolly, Dr. Hodgkin, and a distinguished fellow of this Society, Dr. Chowne. Notwithstanding the fearful position in which the prisoner was placed, the advisers of the Crown threw every possible obstacle in our way by almost prohibiting us from seeing the prisoner in Newgate the day before his trial; indeed, they went so far as to issue an order to the governor of that prison not to allow any medical gentleman to see the accused except in the presence of the late Mr. Aston Key. When we arrived at the portal of that dreary mansion, the governor informed us of the orders which he had received from the Home Secretary. We were detained a considerable time whilst Mr. Key was sent for, but he could not be found; and Mr. Cope, seeing that the ends of justice might be frustrated by further delay, took upon himself the responsibility of admitting us to an interview with Oxford. The result I need not tell you; but I am most anxious on this opportunity to pay a tribute to the benevolence and disinterestedness of the physicians I have mentioned, by stating that, at a great inconvenience and great loss of time, they acted in the cause of humanity without fee or reward, and yet met with every species of insult, and attempted humiliation at the hands of the advocates of the Crown: men who belong to a class, of whom it has been said with some truth, “*Iras et verba locant*”; and whose ready tongues and stock indignation were on this occasion paid for by the hour. The presiding judge, an ornament to the bench, the son of a

physician, behaved with the utmost consideration to the medical witnesses, and in his charge to the jury, treated the gross attacks made by the Crown lawyers upon the evidence given in favour of the prisoner, as most unjust and uncalled for. But the Lord Chief Justice, trammelled by the rules of the profession of which he was so distinguished a member, certainly astonished me, as I have no doubt he did many others, by not allowing the medical witnesses to give an opinion as to the insanity of the prisoner. "We only require you," he said, "to give evidence as to facts; we and the jury are equally competent with you to determine the question at issue." The jury, evidently influenced entirely by the evidence of the medical witnesses, gave, in my opinion, a most righteous and proper verdict; but not until all the arts of rhetoric which a most able and ingenious lawyer had deduced to prevail on them to arrive at a different decision, and that notwithstanding, too, that the Government had retained two of the most celebrated authorities on questions of insanity against the prisoner. The advocates of the Crown, however, had the discretion not to call these witnesses. I have mentioned this case merely as an illustration of the insults to which we are too often subjected. It may not be generally known that in all judicial questions the medical commissioners of lunacy are treated with the utmost disrespect. The reports are transmitted to Government by the lawyer members of the board, without any reference whatever to the opinions of, and without any consultation whatever with, the medical commissioners. It is impossible to believe that such a state of things, calculated to make the whole Commission of Lunacy a "mockery, a delusion and a snare," could exist if our profession were properly represented in Parliament.

Look to the constitution of the Board of Health; the same influence is found at work even there. We who are in every sense of the word the guardians of the public health, play only a secondary, and sometimes a most insignificant, part in that board—insignificant, did I say, there is not a single medical practitioner belonging to it! The chairman of the board is selected, not for his fitness for the office, but on account of the political influence which he can exert in one or other



of the Houses of Parliament. The consequence has been, that the Board of Health has been regarded as a mere byword and a sneer. I cannot pass by the allusion to this board without referring for a moment to the unrewarded and extraordinary labours of a fellow of the Society in relation to the public health. I do this more readily and prominently because the gentleman to whom I allude has retired from the profession. Amongst the more formidable evils to which the community were lately exposed was intramural interment. Experience had long suggested the necessity of burying our dead away from the habitations of the living. Mr. G. A. Walker, practising his profession in a densely-populated neighbourhood, where grave-yards met him at every turn, traced to the influence of these pest-spots innumerable cases of the worst forms of disease. He applied in vain to the authorities to mitigate so serious an evil. They treated him with contumely and insult. He felt that his cause was the cause of humanity, and therefore of the profession to which he belonged, and commenced an agitation of the question, which has resulted in the removal of our burial-places to spots distant from human habitations, and consequently not detrimental to the health of the living. But do not think that this result was obtained without an amount of labour and of sacrifice which few of us would have been able to have endured. I declare to you, that I am perfectly astonished, on reading an account of the unwearied and unrepaid exertions of Mr. Walker, that he could have carried them on to a successful termination. It would be almost incredible, if I were to enter into the details of these sacrifices; and the only reward that he has obtained has been the *mens conscia recti*, and the eminent success of his efforts. But even this satisfaction was not altogether pure and unalloyed. Government failed to acknowledge his services, and a lawyer under Government patronage did not hesitate to make use of his labours, without acknowledgment, or even allusion to his name. The worker—the medical reformer—the man who, unassisted and alone, opposed to influences and prejudices which few could surmount—is unacknowledged by the powers that be; the lawyer, who raised himself to distinction upon



those unrequited labours, retires into private life upon a pension of a thousand a year. I state the facts; you are in a position to draw a moral.

We had on one occasion a striking and humiliating example of our position in reference to Parliament. A Minister of State, celebrated for his shrewdness and tact, in suiting his address to his audience, moved in the House of Commons for leave to bring in a Bill to regulate the medical profession. It was not a hastily-concocted measure, but appeared to have been the result of many conferences and consultations. What did he say upon the subject of giving us protection against quacks and impostors? What encouragement did he hold out to those honourable men, who fully conforming to the regulations laid down by Colleges and Halls, had possessed themselves of the legitimate right to practise—who had spent years in the acquirement of professional knowledge, and who had expended large sums of money to fulfil the obligation which had been imposed upon them? Did he tell them, after the sacrifices they had made, after the toils they had undergone, that the State would secure to them protection to their rights and security to what was legitimately their property? No! Knowing well the feelings of the audience he addressed, and that we were almost totally unrepresented in that august assembly, he hesitated not in throwing overboard our claims to any consideration, to quote a couplet so insolent and offensive, that it is difficult to conceive that it met with anything but an indignant remonstrance. The then Secretary of State for the Home Department representing the Government of this country with a flippancy which cannot be too strongly condemned, justified the patronage of quacks, and, of course, the discountenancing of legitimate practitioners by adopting, as his own, the memorable distich—

“That the pleasure is as great  
In being cheated as to cheat.”

In an assembly of educated gentlemen, it was scarcely to be believed that this most odious couplet could have been cheered to the echo; but so it was. The rights and privileges of many thousands of educated men, the happiness and well being of millions of citizens, was treated as a jest by the collective wisdom of

the nation. Do you believe that the Home Secretary would have had the temerity to have indulged in insult and sarcasm, if the question he had been discussing had related to the profession of the law or the church? Do you believe that if he had dared to utter such a sentiment in relation to either of those learned professions, that he would have met with any encouragement to proceed? It is an impossibility. Not one of the seventy lawyers in the House would have refrained from stigmatizing the speaker as insolent; not a single relative of a bishop, a dean, or a rector, would have hesitated to have denounced the doctrine enunciated as odious and mischievous. But we had no voice, (our one champion being absent from illness,) we had no defenders, none who could come boldly forward to defend their order, and the "witticism" of Sir James Graham in favour of a free trade in physic, was received by the British House of Commons as orthodox, and therefore just. The proposition, however, was so monstrous, that it raised the indignation of many parties out of doors. Of course, the medical press could only regard it as a most flagrant attack upon the rights and privileges of qualified practitioners, and it did not hesitate to denounce the doctrine as most disgraceful to a British statesman. *The Times* newspaper, too, acting on behalf of the public, and fully impressed with the danger which must necessarily follow the carrying out of such a proposition, illustrated, in a series of most ably written articles, the calamities which would ensue from acting upon such a doctrine. What was the result? The members of the profession, from one end of the kingdom to the other, stung by the insult which had been offered to them, individually and collectively, formed themselves into an association to protect their rights. One effect, at least, this association had, it showed the Secretary of State that he had arrayed against the Government, of which he was a member, such a phalanx of opponents, that he was only too glad to apologize for the fault he had committed. Unfortunately, that association, powerful in numbers and in influence, received no support from those quarters from which it had a right to expect it. The consequence was, that it dwindled away into insignificance and powerlessness, when it ought to have exerted a material influence on the fortunes of our profession.

Unfortunately for us, one of those means by which we are enabled to confer immense benefits upon mankind is, from our present unsatisfactory position, made to inflict upon us some of the most serious evils under which we labour. I allude to the system of gratuitous advice. God forbid that the time should ever arrive when the sick poor shall fail to receive, upon all occasions, free assistance at the hands of medical practitioners! Rather than that should be the case, far better would it be that the present system, with all its abuses, should remain in full force. But the evils which have sprung up from that system can scarcely be over-estimated, and not the least of these is its tendency to depreciate in the mind of the public the importance and value of our services. It was said by the physician of Henry the Eighth, a great and humane man, that the fees received from the rich should compensate the practitioner for the services which he renders to the poor—a noble axiom, worthy of all acceptance. In his day, there were no richly endowed hospitals, where the sick and the suffering might obtain the best medical aid in the land, at all times and at all seasons. There was no system of parochial relief—no provision, in fact, made by the State to supply an efficient and qualified army of surgeons, to devote their best energies to the relief of the sick pauper. Is it possible to believe, that if he had lived at the present day he would have thought that our labours in the cause of humanity—that the medical officers to our great hospitals and dispensaries should hold merely honorary appointments? Why should the medical officers of the great endowed hospitals of the metropolis labour for the years they do without fee or reward, and this, too, when the funds of these institutions are so enormous that the governors, unable to disburse them, lavish their income in buildings that rival palaces, and pay all the officials connected with them, except the medical officers, on a princely scale? I know I shall be met by the statement, that the physicians and surgeons of these institutions derive great indirect benefit from the fame and honour which result from their position, and a more direct one from the fees which they receive from the students who attend the schools attached to them. But let me remind you, that this statement applies only to the senior



officers, and not to those who hold a subordinate position. With one, or it may be two, slight exceptions, the assistant medical officers derive no emolument from their office. They may work for many years, devoting their best energies, and most of their time, to the poor, without the receipt of a single shilling, and this at a time, too, when pecuniary assistance is of the utmost importance to them. That this regulation presses with unusual severity upon the assistant medical officer of hospitals no one here, I think, will deny. A single instance, as an illustration, will be sufficient for my purpose. In a largely endowed hospital, almost within reach of the words I am uttering,—a hospital founded “by the piety of a minstrel, and endowed by the munificence of a king,”—a gentleman was lately elected to the office of surgeon. For nearly thirty years he had been the indefatigable and able assistant-surgeon to that institution; he had grown grey in the service; he had devoted his energies during almost a lifetime to the poor, who presented themselves at the gates. I believe I am right when I state that during that long period his most valuable services were perfectly gratuitous. I have no right to inquire how far an adequate remuneration might have been acceptable to him; how far in the earlier years of a professional life, almost always one of difficulty and self-denial, that remuneration might have smoothed his path or contributed to his comforts; but I will say this in behalf of the junior medical officers of such institutions, that it is a disgrace to their governors, it is an injury to our profession, that such services should be so acknowledged.

Do you believe that if we occupied a proper position in relation to the public, that highly educated and talented men should sue for the suffrages of the governors for such appointments? Do you not believe that this supplication, I might almost call it, tends to lower us in the estimation of the public? The system is rotten, and this is one of its baneful results. It would be difficult, perhaps, to find a remedy for some other abuses of the gratuitous system—of such, for instance, as giving advice at home to those well able to pay, and who thus defraud us of our legitimate rights; but you will all admit the enormity of the evil, and its unfavourable influence



upon us. It tends to lower the value of labour in the market, and inflicts a deep injury on the really deserving poor. A physician to a large hospital in London informed me that a subscriber to the institution with which he was connected, a Lady Bountiful, had acquired a great name for her benevolence, by the liberality with which she dispensed her letters of recommendation. No questions were asked of the applicant; a butler acted as her almoner, and in one year she sent no less than 600 patients, many of them well able to pay, as was satisfactorily proved, for medical relief, and all this for the munificent subscription of three guineas per annum! This is the way the profession is injured, and our charities diverted from their legitimate object. In more than one instance it has been proved that the subscriber to a dispensary has received advice from the medical officers by the presentation of a letter of recommendation written by himself. One anecdote more upon this point, and I have done. But this speaks trumpet-tongued of the evils which have crept into the system which I have brought under your notice. I diagnose the nature of the disease; I leave it to others to suggest a remedy. A distinguished surgeon, residing near St. James's-square, was in the habit for many years of giving daily gratuitous advice. He had been called out one morning rather earlier than usual, and returning into the street in which he resides from the square, he noticed a somewhat decrepit person alighting from a coroneted carriage; the face was familiar to him, but at the moment he could not recall on what occasion he had seen it. His gratuitous patients as usual presented themselves in his consulting-room; in due course the carriage gentleman amongst the rest. I need scarcely recount to you the *dénouement*; the moral of the story is patent. This I believe is no solitary case. Charity is abused and the profession injured by such proceedings. Such infringements of the sacred cause of humanity are

“Like spots upon the vestal’s robe,  
The worse for what they soil.”

It has been too much the fashion with those who are opposed to the full recognition of our rights by the State to regard our services as relating only to individuals, and as not bearing socially or politically upon the community. But surely these

objectors take a most imperfect view of the influence which we exert on the welfare of nations and of communities. Are the services conferred upon our armies by the medical officers attached to them of less importance to the welfare, or even to the success, of the troops than those rendered by generals and lieutenants? Were the labours of Jackson really deserving of the shameful neglect which they received from the Government? Or is it to the honour of our rulers that the noble and distinguished services rendered by an honoured fellow of this Society, the greatest of living military surgeons, the veteran Guthrie, were not considered worthy of any mark of especial honour? So thought not the great French emperor with respect to those eminent surgeons who were his companions in the vast campaigns which he undertook. It is unnecessary to recal to your recollection his memorable saying with regard to Larrey, or to the numerous instances in which he showed his respect and esteem to those noble men whom he at least regarded as "more than armies to the public weal." Have we no right to complain that, throughout a long course of naval and military glory, until within the last year or two not a single mark of military distinction was ever conferred upon the medical members of the Army or Navy? Braver or more skilful men are not to be found in any country, and it raises a blush of shame and indignation when we recollect how that bravery and that skill have been rewarded. Even in the present struggle, and after the glorious day of Alma, the omission of the Commander-in-Chief in his first despatch of all mention of the services rendered by the surgeons of the Crimean army appeared like a studied insult. The vote of censure, too, which he has lately passed upon those honourable men appears an attempt to throw blame upon them in order to stifle inquiry into departments of the service, the inefficiency of which had crippled the means and resources of our brethren. What a striking commentary does the conduct of Mr. Thompson offer to that censure! Great as was the heroism displayed upon that memorable day when we first crossed bayonets with the enemy, there is no act, amongst the many deserving of record that will bear any comparison with that heroic act of the lamented Thompson, who volunteered attendance not only

upon our own troops, but also upon the wounded Russians. Alone he rendered those services, and fell a victim to his philanthropic labours. If ever a monument should be raised for great actions upon the field of battle, that monument should be raised to Thompson. But, in the present state of our relations to the country, it were in vain to expect any such tribute of respect to a member of the medical profession. His bones rest in a far-off country, and the State will erect no memorial to his honour in those great temples which are adorned by monuments to the destroyers of life. It is more than probable that our success at Inkermann was owing to the gallant conduct of an assistant-surgeon in the army. When the division under the Duke of Cambridge, overpowered by numbers, and dispirited by the fall of many of its officers, had for a moment given way, Mr. Wilson rallied the men, led them on to a successful charge, turned the fortune of the day, and saved the life of one of the most popular generals in the field. Such an act was too well known to be passed over in silence by the Commander-in-chief, and his name appeared in a despatch from Lord Raglan. And how did the Government reward him? By promoting him to the rank of surgeon.\* In ancient Rome, the civic crown would have been placed upon his brow; in modern France, he would have been decorated with the star of the Legion of Honour.

Let me for one moment recal to your recollection the martyrdom of Sydney Bernard. There is nothing finer in the whole history of chivalry. He, too, received no homage from the Government. He fell a victim to the honour of his country and to humanity; but the profession to which he belonged had no voice to proclaim his merits to the State. His memory, however, will live in the hearts of his countrymen! And here I would wish to mention another name of which we have reason to be proud—Dr. M'William. The heroism which he displayed in the awful Niger expedition—heroism which requires no eulogy from me; the services which he rendered afterwards at Bona Vista are known to the world; and yet, would it be

\* Since this Oration was delivered, I have been informed, upon good authority, that Mr. Wilson was *not* promoted for his gallantry in the field; but simply with others in virtue of his seniority!



believed, this noble member of our profession, after his great services, was the only officer entitled to promotion who did not receive it, on the paltry plea that he was too young to participate in such an honour! These are a few instances amongst many which might be mentioned of the readiness which medical men have ever shown to devote their best energies, and even their lives, to the service of that country which so ill requites them. And here, it may be mentioned, that our great empire in India, at the time when the influence of France had all but wrested the prize from our arms, the services rendered by an English surgeon to a great native prince, did much to consolidate our power, and to turn the tide of fortune in our favour. That great man, too, who has just gone from amongst us, Joseph Hume, was a surgeon. In that capacity he rendered immense service to the Indian government and to his country. To use the language of Lord Palmerston,—“A man with greater industry, a man who devoted his whole life with greater consistency to the good and service of his country, has never sat within these walls. And I am persuaded that those who differed from him in opinion upon the matters which he felt it his duty to bring before this House, and to recommend for the adoption of Parliament, must do him the justice to say that he acted from the purest motives of a sincere desire for the welfare of the country.” But it may be asked of those who speak slightly of the influence which we exert upon the community, who are the foremost in all plans for the elevation of the physical and moral condition of the people? There is not a town in the United Kingdom which is not indebted to the labours of medical practitioners for improvements tending to elevate the health of the community, and for the establishment of literary and scientific institutions.

Without any desire to institute comparison with other professions or callings, we may point with pride and satisfaction to another ground on which we are justly entitled to consideration from the public and the State. No other profession can boast of such great names as adorn that of medicine in all branches of science and literature. Amongst the very highest of those who have contributed to the highest of all inquiries, the



science of mind, are members of the medical profession. Locke, Hartley, Sir Thomas Brown, and, more recently, his great namesake, Dr. Thomas Brown, belong to our craft. Amongst the great scholars which we have a right to claim, are Linacre, Mead, and Parr. Amongst the philosophers and mathematicians we have Young, Wollaston, Davy, and a host of others. In natural history we feel justly proud of the great founder of the British Museum—Sir Hans Sloane, of Hunter, Parry, Wells, and Jenner. But, if we come to literature, we are indeed overwhelmed at the richness of the list. In poetry, which would appear to be allied to medicine, not so much perhaps on account, as George Colman said, of Apollo patronizing both, as from their sympathetic humanizing influence, Aken-side, Arbuthnot, Armstrong, Blackmore, Darwin, Garth, Keats, Walcot, all belong to us; but, above all, we number in our ranks Goldsmith, the poet, the naturalist, and historian,—he whose very title as *Doctor* identifies him with medicine, is all our own; and, it is not too much to conclude, that his experience as a practitioner, limited as it was almost exclusively to the poor, did much to make him acquainted with human nature, and to throw that irresistible charm of sympathy with suffering and oppressed virtue around his writings, to which no other Englishman can lay claim. No higher compliment was ever paid to man than that which Johnson, unused to the language of eulogy, paid to Dr. Goldsmith. The inscription upon Goldsmith's monument, written by the great moralist, contains these words—"Qui nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit." Dr. Moore, the author of "*Zeluco*," was a physician; Dr. Smollett was an assistant-surgeon in the navy; Mason Good was also a physician. It may not be out of place here to state, that the founder of the Royal Humane Society was a doctor of medicine.

Allusion has been made to Jenner as a naturalist, but as the greatest benefactor to his species that ever lived, and as a fellow of this Society, he is deserving of more than a passing notice. It was well said, in the last Hunte-rian Oration, that the lives which the discovery of Jenner has saved outnumber those that war has destroyed through-

out the habitable globe. And it is not foreign to the purpose of this Oration to remark that the success of the application to Parliament for a sum to reward this great benefactor of mankind, inadequate and mean as it was,—taking into consideration the vast estates and enormous sums which were conferred by the country upon Marlborough and Wellington,—was rather owing to the friendly assistance of a Minister than to any just appreciation of his services by the Government or the Legislature. There is one anecdote connected with this distinguished man not unworthy of mention upon this occasion : it was communicated to me by an estimable fellow of this Society, and the grandson of the painter of that picture which adorns our meeting-room. Mr. Medley, the painter, had been under some obligations to the then President of our Society, and anxious to testify his gratitude, he proposed to place upon canvass the portraits of the leading fellows of the Medical Society of London. He had finished his picture,—that picture which recalls in vivid portraiture, the great men who first constituted our body. Just at that period Jenner had risen to distinction, had removed to London, and joined the ranks of this Society. It was incumbent that so distinguished a person should figure in Mr. Medley's picture : there was a vacant space to the left of the President—that space is now occupied by the intelligent and humane face of the great discoverer of vaccination. It may be interesting to those who enter our meeting-room, to know that the painter of the picture above the President's chair is still amongst living men. Every one of those whose faces he has so faithfully portrayed have long since passed away. But he, having long outlived the ordinary period of man's existence, is “still in a green old age.” I feel proud of paying a tribute to the skill of a man who, more than half a century ago placed upon unfading record a meeting of our brethren of that period.

I trust that the subjects which I have undertaken to treat on this important occasion may not be regarded as improper to be discussed by the orator of this Society. There cannot be one amongst us who does not feel anxious that our profession should rise to that position in the State and in public estimation which its usefulness and the high character of its

members justly entitle it. Some of my predecessors in this office have given their views respecting the mode in which this can be effected. Amongst the more prominent of these was a late lamented President of this Society, a gentleman whose premature loss we have had lately to lament.\* In his most masterly oration, he pointed out the necessity of a higher standard of education for those who are to succeed us. No one could have listened to his eloquent exposition of the necessity for such a step without feeling convinced of its imperative importance. The experiment is in course of being carried out, as the improved curricula of our various Colleges amply testify. One of his immediate successors, a highly accomplished and learned physician,† urged upon us, with remarkable ability and force, the importance of the institution of a higher moral and professional position amongst the members of the profession to each other. This, too, I believe, notwithstanding the many disadvantages under which we labour, is being steadily and consistently carried out. But whilst I fully admit the gravity of both these propositions, and of others that have been promulgated, I am firmly of opinion that all of these suggestions will prove powerless to elevate the profession of medicine to its legitimate standard. Until we occupy a more prominent position in the state—until we can make our voice heard with effect in the great councils of the nation—we shall be powerless to remedy a single abuse under which we suffer, or to obtain the protection which is afforded to other learned professions. Looking to the striking fact that that great boon to the profession, the Medical Witnesses Act, was carried through the House by the energy and determination of a single member, not always in favour with the Government, I would ask—Do you believe, that if we were properly represented—and by being properly represented, I mean, not by advocates of this or that section of the profession, or of this or that college or corporation, but advocates, acting upon “the great principle that medicine is a free science, sacred to all humanity, and that every man who devotes himself to the honest cultivation of it becomes a member of a great scientific republic, in which all have equal political rights, and in which rank and honour are

\* Dr. Golding Bird.

† Dr. Hughes Willshire.



the legitimate rewards of superior merit alone,"—do you believe, then, I say, with such representatives in Parliament, that our long ill-used brethren, the naval assistant-surgeons of this empire, would still groan under the unjust regulations to which they are subjected? Do you believe that it would have been in the power of a Lord of the Admiralty to have set at defiance a vote of the House of Commons in relation to this subject? I for one do not. Is it to be believed that with such representatives the claims to redress of that great and important body, the Union surgeons of this kingdom, would have been so long treated with insult? I need not pause for your answer. With such representatives, the superintendence of the Board of Health of all matters relating to the physical well-being of the people would not be entrusted to a layman. With such representatives, so important a subject as vaccination would not have been left to the *dilettante* legislation of a crotchetty but benevolent nobleman. Himself the chairman of a board of guardians, he set at defiance the interests and experience of the great body of the profession, and succeeded in passing a Bill, totally inadequate for the purposes for which it was enacted, and only calculated to retard the extension of the wise and benevolent discovery of Jenner.

Until we possess the means to effectively urge our claims upon the Government, it is in vain to expect protection from the impostors and quacks who bring so much disgrace upon the name of Medicine. It is idle to talk of our respectability and of our position in society, whilst it is in the power of any illiterate vagabond to assume any title—to practise in any way, without the slightest pretence to be an educated practitioner. It is not enough to say, that a more stringent examination of those who honestly and legitimately enter our ranks, is sufficient to fortify us against these aggressions. The public, and not only the ignorant, but the better-educated and higher classes, are utterly unacquainted with the anomalies in the laws which are absurdly said to regulate the practice of medicine. They are consequently imposed upon by the adventurers who falsely assume the titles of honest men. England may well be called "the Paradise of quacks"! To the disgrace of our Legislature the Government stamp still figures on hundreds of quack



nostrums, which have worked with so deadly an effect on the lives and constitutions of Englishmen. This solitary fact would be sufficient, if we possessed not a host of others, to show the little regard which is paid to our profession by the powers that be. It is utterly disgraceful to an enlightened community to witness the shameful and shameless advertisements which crowd more particularly the country newspapers, of medicines for the "cure of all disorders;" and no one calculated to form an opinion upon the subject can have any other feeling than that of intense disgust, on finding that the name of the inventor of the nostrum is printed by the authority of the Government on the stamp, as an indication that the preparation is genuine! Who can calculate the amount of misery, which for the sake of a paltry item in the revenue, the Government inflicts upon the people, by its sanction and support of what I can designate as nothing but a fraud. The records of our criminal courts occasionally afford us melancholy illustrations of this most monstrous evil. But these seem to fall under the notice of the authorities only to be disregarded. The myriads of cases that never meet the public eye can never be calculated. Once—and once only—does it appear that any notice has been taken of these frightful cases, and to the honour of the late noble Secretary of State for the Home Department be it said, with his accustomed energy and determination, the institution of proceedings against the offender were brought to a successful termination. But in those numerous cases in which a verdict of manslaughter has been returned by a coroner's jury, the criminals have escaped, though the cases against them have been as clear as noon-day, in consequence of that most unsatisfactory state of the law which unfortunately places the qualified and unqualified practitioner in the same position under such a charge, as if the intent only were to be taken into consideration, and the mistake of the educated was to be placed on the same footing as the ignorance of the pretender. Indeed, this condition of things acts with unusual severity upon the really qualified members of the profession; for we all know with what harshness the law metes out its punishment to them, whilst it throws its protecting shield over those who are not in a condition to plead their legal right to be practitioners of

medicine. Do you believe that if we had even the slightest connexion with the State that such a condition of things would for a moment longer be tolerated? A lawyer of influence in the House of Commons has made it a misdemeanour for any unqualified man to practise in the legal profession, either directly or indirectly. A church represented in the House of Lords guards with the utmost jealousy the privileges of churchmen. But medicine, unrepresented in either House, is treated as unworthy of the slightest consideration. With such a state of things it is useless to expect that we, by our unaided efforts, can ever attain to the position to which we are entitled. The advocates of free trade in physic would do well to consider what the law has done for other professions, and what it has left undone for our own. It may perhaps be urged by those who take an opposite view to that which I have placed before you, that no law can ever reach those offenders against the honour and dignity of legitimate medicine, who, actuated by a low desire for mere pecuniary advantage, become practisers, if not disciples, of such heresies as homœopathy and hydropathy. I admit the gravity and the force of that objection, and can only lament that such men are admitted and tolerated as members of any colleges or societies which were instituted for the advancement of the healing art. We can speak only for ourselves; but we do speak with some pride and satisfaction that none of these pseudo-quacks are to be found in the rolls of our Society; and further, that if any such should seek for the suffrages of the fellows of the Medical Society of London, their claims to be admitted as associates of such a body would be treated with the ignominy and contempt which they would so richly deserve. It would be well for some societies and even some colleges to follow the example which we have thus set them—an example which, if acted upon, might not completely eradicate the evil, but would certainly give “a heavy blow and great discouragement” to such offenders against a noble profession.

And here I may be excused if I refer for a moment to the Medical Press, with which I have the pleasure to be associated. Surely the enemies of that mighty engine forget, in their mistaken zeal, the benefits which that press has conferred upon institutions similar to our own. By its agency, the transactions

of this and other societies are made to serve the interests of humanity throughout the civilized world. By its agency, not only in every portion of the globe in which the English tongue is spoken, are the papers which are read, and the discussions which take place, known and appreciated, but they find an echo in every language which belongs to civilized man. The effect of crushing that agency would be to throw us back to the dark ages.

It has been the boast of literature that it is a republic, and that honours are conferred upon the members of that body without any reference to their position in society, or to any adventitious claims which they may have to distinction. The great men whose names have done honour to the Augustan era in England were associated with the highest and the noblest in the land. The friends of Dryden and of Pope—

“Chiefs out of war, and statesmen out of place”—

thought it a privilege to meet on equal terms with the men who have thrown such a lustre on the literature of England; and, whatever may be said to the contrary, the friendship and what is called patronage of such men was never regarded or acknowledged in any but a noble spirit upon the part of the illustrious poets. Even at that time the public could and did appreciate the relative position of the parties, and failed not to give honour where honour was due. Posterity has endorsed the verdict, and the manly and vigorous couplets of Dryden, and the finished and classic lines of Pope, are familiar to us as household words, whilst the “woful stuff” which formed the staple of the madrigals of the scribblers of their time is forgotten, and only to be found after search in the miscellanies of Dodsley, or some equally obscure entombment. It is surely no idle boast that we in this Society at least have acted upon the principle of making medicine a republic. Every fellow who joins our ranks becomes from that moment equal in privileges, equal in rights, and can look to the highest honours which it is in our power to bestow as reasonably within his reach, and on entering our ranks may justly echo the proud boast of the French soldier, that it is also possible “he carries a marshal’s bâton in his knapsack.” Yes, Sir, even that chair, which you so ably fill, is surrounded by no barriers which the humblest



amongst us cannot pass, provided he shows his fitness for that distinguished position. Surely it must be owing to this liberal spirit that we are indebted for our present most prosperous condition; and it speaks trumpet-tongued for this Society, that, venerable from its age, universal in its fame, and associated as it is with the greatest names that adorn our profession, that we, in our selection of fellows for offices of honour, look only to their merits, to their fitness, and to their usefulness.

On this, the 82nd anniversary of our existence, we are presided over by a gentleman belonging to that class absurdly denominated "general practitioners." During no previous year of our long career have we had a more prosperous session, more important papers brought before us, or more able discussions upon them. We seek not to place ourselves in antagonism with bodies of a similar kind. They have a right to exercise their own discretion in the management of their own affairs; they have a right to make the path to office narrow and exclusive, and to seek to perpetuate distinctions which at the best we can only regard as the relics of a narrow policy, and the remains of a mistaken system of Government. We only point to our own position and say, "We are prosperous, we are united, we act upon that true conservative principle, which adapts itself to the times, and flourishes like a tree from which the useless branches have been lopped, that the new fibres may be invigorated. The records of past years, and our present position, show that we have acted wisely; not even an enemy has ever dared to insinuate that by carrying out this principle we have lessened the importance of a single office of this Society; the purity of the ermine has never been soiled; the dignity of the purple has never been lowered. Fortified by the experience of the past, we are conscious that by so acting we are friends to the true interests of the profession. In years to come, our successors, we trust, will look back upon our example, as a stimulus for them to pursue the same course, and by such means to hand down to posterity the high fame of the Medical Society of London."